

August 25, 1976

Nobel Peace Prize Committee
Storting
Oslo, Norway

Gentlemen,

I ask that you accept this letter as a testimonial to my support for and association with the nomination of the World Health Organization as a candidate for the next Nobel Prize for Peace.

I have had some closer insight into the WHO, especially during the past 5 years by virtue of my membership on its Advisory Council for Medical Research. There is no doubt that the WHO plays a unique role with respect to the health of the world's population in a fashion that is an unexampled realization of the ideals for which the Peace Prize was established and continuous to be justified. There are many reasons why this is a particularly apt time to render such a recognition, if no other, one could already mention the astounding progress towards the eradication of smallpox which is well known.

I am sure that you will already have received substantial documentation detailing the actual work of the WHO during the last 30 years and that it would be superfluous for me to add to that detail.

One would be naive, however, not to recognize the complications that are inevitably attached to any assessment of WHO as applies equally to virtually any other international organization at the present stage of the world's political development. To an increasing degree the WHO and particularly its official political governing body, the World Health Assembly, has been the seat of perceptive political conflict which has attempted to redirect the focus and the legitimacy of the work of WHO in ways that have little to do with the medical problems of international health. One does not know what further political crisis may enmesh the organization precisely at the moment that it may be under consideration for this award. These are considerations with which your Committee is, I am sure, very well acquainted and to which it would exercise the utmost sensitivity.

However, I hope that they do not deter the Committee from continuing to give this candidacy the most serious and sympathetic consideration. Similar complications attend almost every large-scale enterprise, particularly those with a mobile political emphasis capable of having the largest impact on the affairs of the world. Even the concept of disarmament inevitably carries a certain ambivalence in terms of the implications that

8/25/76

this may have in further realpolitik. In this respect WHO is not immune to existential tensions but it may be said so far to have been relatively insulated from them. Indeed, by focusing on the concrete health oriented accomplishments of WHO in its award, the Peace Prize Committee may well be capable of adding a beneficent influence on the further sustenance of WHO as an agency for world peace and world health. The political conflicts to which I refer are far more in the realm of the governing Assembly than they are of the Secretariat and the Director-General and certainly his own hand would be strengthened towards maintaining the firm direction of the organization were it to be the recipient of a peace prize award directed at its tangible accomplishments in world health. In other circumstances I might even have advocated the singling out of the smallpox eradication program per se as a less complicated example, but to do this might have generated still other conflicts and might be regarded as inappropriate for a number of other reasons. The same ends could be served by an award to the organization per se but with special mention of those important gains that justify the award. Likewise the stewardship of Dr. Candau, for so many years Director-General of the organization and which laid the groundwork for programs like smallpox eradication, would deserve specific recognition in a similar fashion.

Yours respectfully,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, 1958

JL/rr

cc: Gus Nossal
Martin Kaplan